

Newsletter Winter 2012

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HEALTHY KIDS BETTER STUDENTS

**MASSACHUSETTS
COORDINATED
SCHOOL HEALTH PROGRAM**

Hello and welcome to the winter edition of the Coordinated School Health (CSH) newsletter. In each issue of our seasonal newsletters, we focus on one topic relating to school health concerns—including the latest research, success stories and action steps for schools. This issue highlights how health is related to academic achievement. Research shows that students who eat nutritious foods and are physically active stay healthier and perform better in school. Schools can influence and reinforce healthy behaviors in their students by providing high quality nutrition, physical education and physical activity programs.

If you have any questions about our program or need assistance implementing Coordinated School Health or Wellness Policies, please contact us.

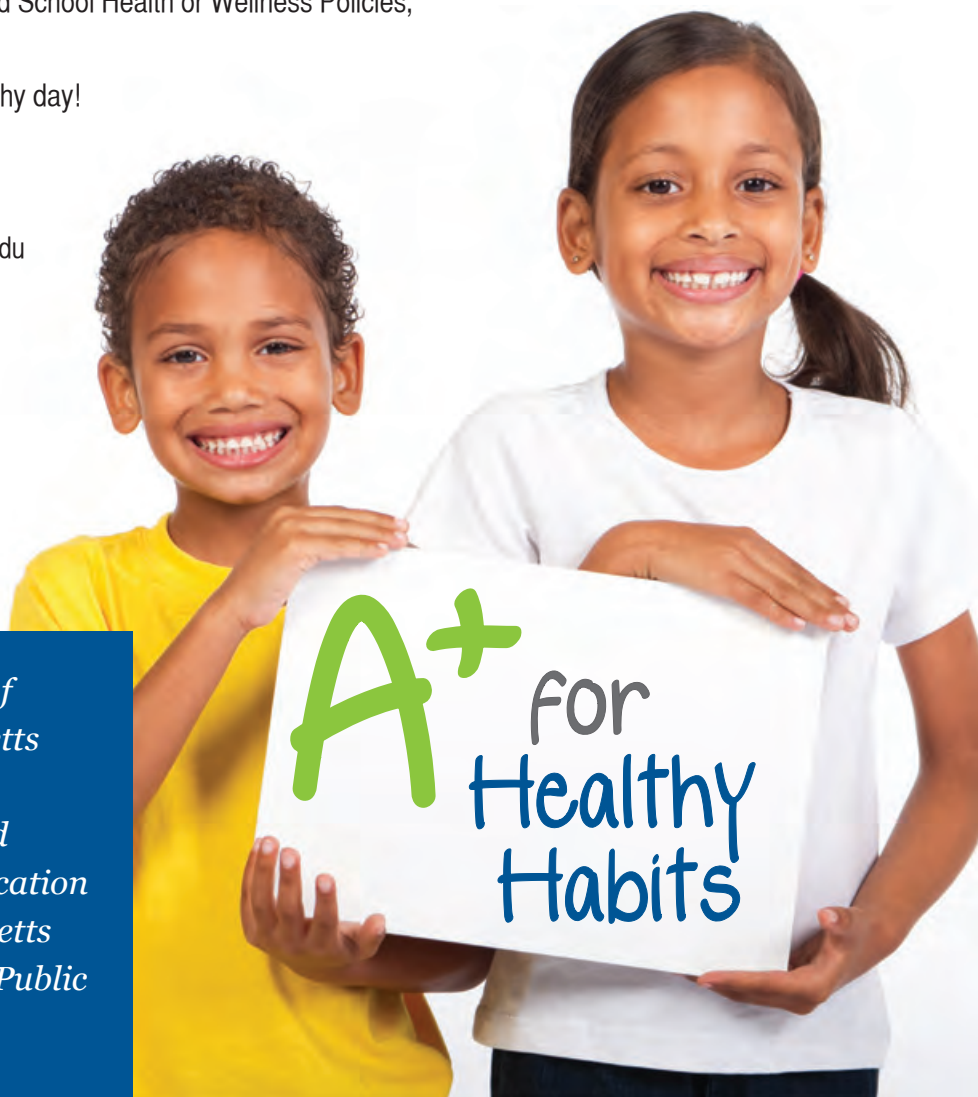
Thanks, and have a healthy day!

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*A partnership of
the Massachusetts
Department of
Elementary and
Secondary Education
and Massachusetts
Department of Public
Health.*

Coordinated School Health (CSH)

CSH is a joint initiative between the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Massachusetts Department of Public Health funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Adolescent and School Health (CDC/DASH). Our team's primary goal is to improve school policies, environment and instruction relating to physical activity, nutrition and tobacco.

Research shows that improvement in these areas contributes not only to the healthy development of students, but to their academic success as well.

CSH staff provides training and resources to schools to promote the healthy development of Massachusetts youth. Staff members also provide technical assistance, such as curriculum guidance or implementation of school physical activity, nutrition and tobacco policies. To learn more about CSH, please visit: www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/CSHP.



2011 Massachusetts School Wellness Award Winners

Gold-level

Bridge Elementary School, Lexington
Foxborough Regional Charter School

Bronze-level

Everett High School
Kennedy Elementary School, Brockton
North Intermediate School, Wilmington
West Intermediate School, Wilmington

Massachusetts Success Stories: School Health Awards

National Health Coordinator of the Year in Brockton

Mary Ellen Kirrane, M.S.Ed, has been named Health Coordinator of the Year 2011 by the American School Health Association. She was recognized at the organization's annual conference in Louisville, Ky., on October 12. The award recognizes members who have demonstrated exceptional service in the area of school health coordination.

Ms. Kirrane is recognized for her professional leadership in the coordination of school health across the Brockton Public School District in Massachusetts, where she serves as head of the wellness department, K-8. In her role, she oversees the implementation of the pre-K-8 wellness curricula and coordinates all district wellness initiatives. For the past 18 years, Ms. Kirrane has written and implemented several system-wide grants that have impacted the district greatly. Middle school fitness centers, international nutrition events, peer programs and violence prevention curriculum have just been a few of the changes that her grant work has produced for the district. Ms. Kirrane acts as a liaison with other departments and community agencies in implementing local and state health mandates, most recently the newly signed Anti-Bullying Prevention and Intervention Model Plan project.

One of Ms. Kirrane's major focuses has been in advocacy for broadening health education in the Brockton Public Schools. She has worked closely with classroom teachers to integrate health concepts and skills into daily lessons. Ms. Kirrane has often begun presentations by reminding administrators and teachers that, "all teachers are teachers of reading, writing and arithmetic and also can be teachers of wellness when given the right tools."

Ms. Kirrane chairs the Brockton Public School District Coordinated School Wellness Team. Over

the past four years, the team has established school-based teams that meet regularly to assess the wellness needs of their buildings and to create yearly goals and objectives. Through the coordination of the district team, each school is provided resources and support to achieve their goals.

2011 Massachusetts School Wellness Award Winners

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Massachusetts Department of Public Health (ESE, DPH) would like to congratulate the following recipients of the second annual **Massachusetts School Wellness Award!** These award winning schools have shown a strong commitment to the health of their students and staff and we commend them for their outstanding achievement in:

- School Health Policies**
Health Education • Physical Education
Physical Activity • Nutrition
Staff Wellness • Tobacco Prevention

Program Highlights:

- The **Foxborough Regional Charter School** celebrates MCAS by holding a "prep" rally for students immediately preceding the initial testing week. As studies have shown a link between physical activity and academic achievement, the students compete against each other in active obstacle course races and academic challenge quizzes. The rally includes a competition between student teams in grades 3, 4, and 5 as well as a staff team of teachers. The grade-level winners receive extra recess time and a non-dress code day. Additionally, the school opens the gymnasium to students and families every Saturday morning and a physical education teacher works with participants to improve their health and fitness.



- The **Bridge Elementary School in Lexington** offers a series of classes called "Kids Cooking Green" which introduces 5th and 6th grade students to the importance of eating locally grown, nutritious food. The classes are held after school and emphasize starting from scratch, including planting seeds in the school garden, harvesting the plants, and preparing healthy food items in the school cafeteria. Local farmers, nutritionists and chefs are invited to the classes to help with the teaching. The series culminates with a food celebration where students display their new knowledge to their families. The program has been such a success that it is now being used by four other elementary schools in Lexington.
- At the **Kennedy School in Brockton**, 130 parents and students participated in the school's annual Family Health Night which highlights healthy eating and physical activity. Parents and children attended an educational cooking class featuring food choices that can be easily replicated at home. In the gym, they joined in fun movement activities facilitated by the physical education teacher. Information on local youth programs and healthy snack recipes were also provided in take home bags.
- The **West Intermediate School in Wilmington** worked to switch the recess schedule for grade 5 students so that they would go out for recess prior to eating lunch. Since that time, students

have been observed as more settled and they are eating more of their lunch and wasting less food. Teaching staff have noticed that students are more attentive and quicker to get back to work when they return to class. Additionally, data from school nurse office visits indicate a significant decrease in illness visits for complaint of headaches and stomachaches.

- The **North Intermediate School in Wilmington** offers weekly health information to students and staff through morning announcements. "Physically Fit Fridays" with School Nurse Ferrara promotes a variety of physical fitness and nutrition topics in a format that is informative yet humorous and has captured the attention of students, staff, and families.
- **Everett High School** built a well-equipped fitness center that is open to all faculty and students during the school day as well as after school. An average of 70 students use the center after school on a daily basis. Students and staff are also invited to attend Boot Camp sessions that are led by faculty members and the school partners with a local recreation center to offer a wide array of physical fitness programs including kickboxing, Zumba, and yoga.



Students' nutrition and physical activity levels are directly linked to factors affecting academic performance such as absenteeism, classroom behavior, the ability to concentrate, cognitive performance and test scores. In the past few years, there have been many studies and reports on all different aspects of this topic.

Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain, written for a general audience, is an engaging account of the scientific literature on the link between physical activity and the brain. Author John J. Ratey, MD, explains how regular exercise increases the production of cells in the hippocampus, the region of the brain involved in learning and memory, resulting in better brain function. In one amazing case study, he describes a revolutionary fitness program in Naperville, Ill., schools, which helped to move those schools to first in the world of science test scores.

The CDC's *The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education, and Academic Performance* examined 50 studies on the links between school-based physical activity, including physical education, and academic success. The majority of the studies found that physical activity was positively related to academic performance, including academic achievement (grades, standardized test scores); academic behavior (on-task behavior, attendance); and factors that can positively influence academic achievement (concentration, attention, improved classroom behavior). Most importantly, adding time during the school day for physical activity did not appear to take away from academic performance. (www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/index.htm#3)

In *Healthier Students are Better Learners: A Missing Link in School Reform to Close the Achievement Gap*, Professor Charles E. Basch reviewed research from more than 300 sources and reported that seven key health disparities impact student learning. Two of these disparities include not getting enough physical activity and skipping breakfast, both of which influence cognitive functioning. He also noted that a variety of strategies have been tried to help close the achievement gap, such as No Child Left Behind and more rigorous teacher certification, but that seven health risks are disproportionately impairing academic performance of disadvantaged urban students and need to be addressed in schools. (www.equitycampaign.org/i/a/document/12557_EquityMattersVol6Web03082010.pdf)

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Health & Academic Achievement (Continued)

Through the national Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS; www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm), CDC monitors student health-risk behaviors and the extent to which these behaviors are associated with academic achievement. Data from the 2009 YRBS showed a negative association between physical inactivity and unhealthy dietary behaviors and academic achievement after controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade level (www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/physical_inactivity_unhealthy_weight.pdf). This means that students who are physically active and do not engage in poor dietary behaviors (such as daily consumption of soda or unhealthy weight control methods) receive higher grades than their classmates who are physically inactive and do engage in unhealthy dietary behaviors.

All these findings indicate that in order for schools to provide the best learning environment for their students, they need to increase the amount of time spent and/or quality of their physical education program; provide plenty of opportunities for physical activity before, during and after the school day, such as recess and physical activity breaks in the classroom, walk/bike-to-school programs, and non-competitive intramural and interscholastic sports; and offer nutrient rich breakfast, lunch and snack options throughout the entire school campus.

Are you on the list?

Every week, our program sends out a variety of school health-related resources and information such as new health research, professional development offerings and grant opportunities. If you are not on our listserv, please send an email to CMilligan@doe.mass.edu and ask to be added. Also, if you have any school health dilemmas and would like input from other members, feel free to send your questions to the above email to be forwarded to the group.



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